

IAU Code of Conduct

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Overview

The mission of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) is to promote and safeguard astronomy in all its aspects (including research, communication, education and development) through international cooperation. The IAU embraces scientists from all backgrounds who are united in the common goal of promoting and advancing the astronomical sciences. Science is best advanced when there is mutual trust, respect and integrity, and when it is conducted in environments free from harassment. The IAU Executive Committee has a responsibility to set the norms for the professional behaviour of its members, especially as they pertain to IAU-related activities. This IAU Code of Conduct includes an Ethics Policy and an Anti-harassment Policy.

It is implicit that all IAU members and junior members have read this Code of Conduct and agree to abide by it. In addition, everyone who registers for an IAU meeting or activity agrees implicitly to abide by the Code of Conduct and accepts the prescribed protocols therein.

Part A: Ethics Policy for IAU Meetings and Activities

All scientists should act ethically in the conduct of their research and teaching, and in relations with members of the public as well as members of the scientific community. This IAU Ethics Policy¹ is a set of guidelines and best practices for professional behaviour, including participation in IAU-sponsored activities (e.g., meetings, publications, IAU governance) and in other astronomical activities (e.g., research, education, publishing, peer review, outreach). A process to file a complaint and guide the resolution of alleged violations, when they occur during IAU-related activities, is also included in Appendix A. This document applies to IAU individual and junior members as well as to the operation of its Divisions, Commissions, Working Groups and international offices (including the Office of Astronomy for Development, Office for Astronomy Outreach, Office for Young Astronomers and Office of Astronomy for Education) in professional astronomical activities.

Within the larger astronomical community, everyone bears responsibility for upholding a set of common scientific and ethical standards in professional activities, and for assigning consequences when these standards are breached. The IAU does not have the authority nor the means to accept responsibility for investigating and adjudicating suspected breaches of ethics that are the rightful jurisdiction and responsibility of other community stakeholders. All members should familiarize themselves with their own institutional guidelines, policies and procedures related to the oversight and maintenance of ethical standards for research and conduct, and share this information with their colleagues and students.

1. Conduct Towards Others

Everyone involved in activities of the IAU should treat others with professional respect and equal consideration in both written and spoken communication. Astronomers should work to provide an environment that encourages the free expression and exchange of scientific ideas. They should promote equality of opportunity and fair treatment for all their colleagues, regardless of gender, race, ethnic and national origin, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, or any other reason not related to scientific merit.

2. Harassment

Abusive, demeaning, humiliating, or intimidating behaviour or abuses of power are unacceptable. The IAU Anti-harassment Policy is part of the IAU Code of Conduct and covers all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment, verbal abuse and bullying (see Code of Conduct Part B). This IAU Ethics Policy, also part of the Code of Conduct, implicitly includes all the provisions of the IAU Anti-harassment Policy.

¹ This Policy is largely adapted from the American Astronomical Society's Code of Ethics, <https://aas.org/policies/ethics>.

3. Research

Research should be carried out with honesty and integrity. Data and research results should be maintained in a form that allows review and reproduction by others. Researchers involved in funded studies or allocated telescope time should make results available in a timely manner. The fabrication, falsification or selective reporting of data with the intent to mislead or deceive is unethical, as is the appropriation of unpublished proprietary data or research results from others without permission and attribution.

Astronomers occasionally perform research involving human subjects, including educational studies and surveys, which may be subject to regulations. Investigators should contact the relevant authorities at their home institution, who will rule on exemptions or approvals.

4. Publication

Authors of IAU publications are expected to adhere to basic standards of professional ethics and conduct that are common across all areas of scholarly publishing. Authors implicitly affirm that their work is original and has not been published elsewhere. Authors publishing in other professional journals should also adhere to these basic standards as well as other journal requirements.

Anyone (and only those) who has made contributions to a work intended for publication, including the inception, design, execution or interpretation of the research, should be offered the opportunity to be a co-author. Authors are responsible for providing timely corrections or retractions if errors that could be misleading are found in published works, with the corresponding author bearing primary responsibility. Every co-author has both an obligation and a right to review a manuscript before its submission; it is the responsibility of the corresponding author to ensure this opportunity.

Proper acknowledgment should also be given to individuals who have made minor contributions to a study. Authors have an obligation to include a set of references for the precedents, sources and context of the reported work. Data provided by others must be cited appropriately. Data obtained from public databases should be cited in accordance with the guidelines and recommendations of the source from which they were obtained. Sources of financial support for any project should be acknowledged.

Plagiarism, which is unethical behaviour, is the act of reproducing text, ideas or other material from sources without proper credit, whether it is inserted verbatim or has been modified or paraphrased. While it is reasonable to refute other works based on respectful scientific arguments, it is unethical to include personal attacks or derogatory language.

These obligations apply not only to scholarly journals, but also to other forms of scientific communication, including but not limited to press releases, proposals, websites, posters, talks, popular books and podcasts.

5. Peer Review

Peer review is an essential component of many aspects of the scientific process, including evaluating research proposals, reviewing submitted manuscripts, and assessing colleagues for career advancement. Peer review is effective only if members of the scientific community provide thorough, fair, respectful, timely and objective evaluations. Reviewers should be aware of unconscious bias. Materials provided in confidence for peer review must not be used or disclosed by the reviewers, and discussions among reviewers must be held in strictest confidence. It is unethical to seek to gain an advantage by means of reviewing the work of others, either through use of private information or biased reviews. Although peer review can be difficult and time-consuming, scientists have an obligation to participate in the process.

6. Conflicts of Interest

Many activities of scientists and educators, such as serving on review or advisory panels or on scientific organizing committees for meetings, have the potential for a conflict of interest. IAU members should educate themselves on the scope of what constitutes a conflict of interest under various circumstances. Any professional relationship or action that could be a conflict or could be perceived as a conflict of interest should be fully disclosed. If a conflict of interest cannot be properly managed, the activity should be avoided or discontinued. Many organizations have conflict-of-interest policies as well as mechanisms for managing conflicts, for example, through recusal.

See Appendix A for reporting a violation of the Ethics Policy that occurred during an IAU-related activity.

Part B: Anti-harassment Policy for IAU Meetings and Activities

The IAU opposes any discrimination or harassment based on such factors as ethnic origin, religion, citizenship, language, political or other opinion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or age.

The IAU is committed to preventing any incident of harassment that may occur during the General Assemblies, Symposia, Focus Meetings, and in general in any activity of its scientific bodies or offices in which the IAU has or shares responsibility. This includes any associated events such as social activities, informal gatherings or schools/workshops attached to the above-mentioned events.

1. Statement of Anti-harassment Policy

It is the policy of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) that all participants in IAU activities will enjoy an environment free from all forms of discrimination, harassment and retaliation. As a professional Union, the IAU is committed to providing an atmosphere that encourages the free expression and exchange of scientific ideas. In pursuit of that ideal, the IAU is dedicated to the philosophy of equality of opportunity and treatment for all members, regardless of gender, gender identity or expression, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, religion or religious belief, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities, veteran status, or any other reason not related to scientific merit. Harassment, sexual or otherwise, is a form of misconduct that undermines the integrity of IAU meetings. Violators of this policy will be subject to disciplinary actions (see Appendix B).

2. Definition of Harassment

In general, harassment is a conduct that exerts unwelcome pressure or intimidation. Such conduct includes, but is not limited to: epithets, slurs or negative stereotyping; threatening, intimidating or hostile acts; denigrating jokes and display or circulation of written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion towards an individual or group.

Particularly serious is the sexual harassment that refers to unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment does not refer to occasional compliments of a socially acceptable nature. It refers to behaviour that is not welcome, is personally offensive, decreases morale, and therefore interferes with work effectiveness. The following are examples of behaviour that, when unwelcome, may constitute sexual harassment: sexual flirtations, advances or propositions, unwelcome sexual attention (such as unwanted touching or repeated requests for dates); verbal comments or physical actions of a sexual or sexually suggestive nature; sexually degrading words used to describe an individual; a display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures; sexually explicit jokes; dismissive or insulting modes of address.

Because of the wide international nature of the IAU, it is important to realize that behaviour and language that are welcome/acceptable to one person may be unwelcome/offensive to

another. Consequently, individuals must use discretion to ensure that their words and actions communicate respect for others. This is especially important for those in positions of authority (including all members of LOCs, SOC in IAU meetings), since individuals with lower rank or status may be reluctant to express their objections or discomfort regarding unwelcome behaviour.

3. Scope of Anti-harassment Policy

This policy applies to all attendees at IAU activities, including scientists, students, guests, staff, contractors and exhibitors, participating in the scientific sessions, tours and social events, workshops or schools associated with any IAU meeting or other activity. All meeting attendees have a role to play in creating an inviting and harassment-free environment through their own behaviour and the discouragement of harassing behaviour in others.

Complainants and others who provide relevant information (witnesses) will be protected from retaliation (negative social or professional actions – or threats of negative actions – taken against a complainant or individual who participates in an investigation).

4. Acknowledgement of Acceptance of Anti-Harassment Policy

All SOC members, LOC members and session chairs will be required to acknowledge having read and agreed to the policy. They must also acknowledge that, as persons in positions of power, they will ensure that the policy is enforced and report all violations that come to their attention to the SOC chair(s). All participants of the IAU meetings/activities will be implicitly bound by the policy.

5. Advertisement of Anti-harassment Policy at IAU Meetings and Activities

The organizers of the IAU supported meeting/activity are responsible for broad advertisement of the IAU anti-harassment policy. The IAU policy must be advertised on the conference website. It must also be displayed and explicitly mentioned by the organizers in the open session of the conference.

It is the responsibility of the organizers to inform all participants about the IAU policy on anti-harassment and to instruct the Sessions' Chairs on the procedure to be followed should a harassment incident occur during the sessions.

The organizers are required to identify two SOC members as "responsible individuals" to whom anyone can report any incident. The names of these individuals should be made widely known to all participants.

See Appendix B for reporting a violation of the Anti-harassment Policy that occurred during an IAU-related activity.

Part C: House Rules for the use of IAU official Facebook page and Twitter account

The IAU has published its House Rules for the use of its official Facebook page and Twitter account. These rules may be found via the following link:

<https://www.facebook.com/InternationalAstronomicalUnion/notes>.

Appendices for Reporting Violations During IAU Activities

Appendix A: Reporting a Violation of the Ethics Policy during an IAU Activity

Anyone who participates in an IAU-sponsored meeting or activity may make a timely complaint of an alleged violation of the IAU Ethics Policy that occurred during the event. All complaints should be directed to the General Secretary. The procedure is outlined below. In the case of harassment at sponsored meetings, the IAU Anti-Harassment Policy procedures will have precedence.

a. Filing a Complaint

A complaint of an alleged violation of the Ethics Policy may be filed with the General Secretary. The Complainant is required to include their name and professional address (anonymous complaints will not be accepted); the name and (where known) professional address of the Respondent (that is, the person accused of the ethical breach); the provisions of the Ethics Policy alleged to have been violated; a full statement of conduct alleged to have violated the Ethics Policy, including the sources of all information on which the allegations are based; copies of any documents supporting the allegations (including statements from witnesses); a statement that other legal or institutional proceedings involving the alleged conduct have not been initiated or, if initiated, the status of such proceedings; and any other information pertinent to the complaint.

Complainants who make allegations of ethics code breaches in bad faith will be subject to the same types of disciplinary action to which violators of the Ethics Policy are subject.

b. Procedure

1. The General Secretary will forward the complaint to the Executive Committee.
2. The Executive Committee will appoint a Chair plus two additional members of an ad hoc ethics committee (hereinafter AHEC) (typically drawn from the Executive Committee) to oversee the handling of that complaint. Potential conflicts of interest must be declared openly, and no-one with a conflict of interest shall participate in the deliberations or decision.
3. In the event that a complainant alleges conduct that is, or may be, the subject of other legal or institutional proceedings, the AHEC may defer further action until the conclusion of the other legal or institutional proceedings. The AHEC may use those findings as a basis for considering any IAU actions.
4. Upon the AHEC review of the Complainant's submitted materials, if probable cause for action is found, the AHEC Chair shall provide a copy of the complaint documentation to the Respondent. The Respondent will be asked for a written response to the complaint within 30 days.
5. The AHEC may communicate with the Complainant, the Respondent, any witnesses, and/or consider other sources of information necessary to carry out its functions.

6. The AHEC Chair shall submit a written report to the General Secretary of the committee's findings, supporting evidentiary materials and any recommendations for sanction when a violation of the Ethics Policy is found to have occurred.
7. The General Secretary will notify the Complainant and the Respondent of the findings, determination and any sanctions by written report, and inform the Executive Committee.
8. The Complainant and the Respondent may submit a response in writing within 30 days.
9. After the end of the 30-day period, the General Secretary will take the appropriate actions if a sanction is imposed, except that such notice will be postponed if an appeal is filed.
10. The details of a filed complaint and all proceedings will be kept confidential by the AHEC and the Executive Committee of the IAU.

c. Disciplinary Actions

Individuals engaging in unethical behaviour prohibited by this policy will be subject to disciplinary action. Such sanctions range from a verbal warning to ejection from the meeting or activity in question without refund of registration fees and may, at the discretion of the IAU Executive Committee, include the reporting of their behaviour to the national committee and their employer.

The IAU Executive Committee may decide on further disciplinary action for repeat or serious offenders, such as being banned from participating in future IAU meetings or other IAU-related activities for a period of time, or even having the IAU membership revoked in serious cases.

d. Appeal of Determination

A Respondent who receives a sanction for a violation of the Ethics Policy may appeal this determination to the IAU President, who will make a determination in consultation with the Executive Committee. Both the Respondent and the Complainant will be notified of the final appeal determination.

Appendix B: Reporting an Incident of Harassment during an IAU Activity

In the eventuality of a clear case of verbal harassment during a scientific session, the Chair person(s) should act immediately to stop it. If the situation deteriorates, he/she should ask the people involved to leave the room.

Any individual covered by this policy who believes that he or she has been subjected to harassment should report the incident. If any form of harassment occurs in a less openly visible way (e.g. during social activities or informal gatherings), the affected person and/or witness should immediately report it to one of the Organizers or to one of the designated “responsible individuals” for the meeting/IAU activity (hereinafter the “reporter”).

In the event that one of the organizers is the alleged offender, the individual may contact one of the designated “responsible individuals” or directly contact the IAU General Secretary for further guidance.

a. Filing a Complaint

The following is advice for reporting any incident (or suspected incident) pertaining to discrimination or harassment.

Write everything down (times, places, nature of the incident and comments made). Save emails, notes, etc. Tell someone you trust. It is likely that you will have to write and sign an official letter of complaint, documenting the nature of the harassment and/or discrimination. Be as detailed as possible. If possible, supporting documentation and statements from witnesses should be submitted with your letter.

The written report of an incident may be made by the complainant or by a colleague/friend/associate of the individual (with the permission of the individual who has been subjected to harassment) and submitted to the reporter. All complaints will be treated seriously and be investigated promptly. The complainant is not required or expected to discuss the concern with the alleged offender.

The reporter should make written notes of the incident, attaching any possible evidence and enquiring about any witnesses. The reporter should then give the alleged offender the opportunity to be heard and respond to the complaint or allegations.

A full report about the incident should then be sent by the reporter to the IAU General Secretary including the immediate initiatives the reporter has undertaken following the IAU anti-harassment policy.

The General Secretary will promptly report any case of harassment that occurs during an IAU meeting to the rest of the IAU Executive Committee.

Confidentiality will be honoured, to the extent permitted, as long as the rights of others are not compromised.

b. Procedure

1. The Executive Committee will name an impartial investigator, usually an IAU Officer or Executive Committee member. Any named investigator who believes they have a conflict of interest should not serve as an investigator. The complainant will be informed of the name of the investigator and allowed to contest the choice should he/she believe that the investigator is conflicted. In egregious cases of sexual harassment or sexual assault the IAU reserves the right to engage an outside professional or agency trained in the handling of sensitive sexual harassment cases.
2. In most cases, the complainant will be interviewed first and the written complaint reviewed. If the complainant has not already filed a formal complaint, he or she should be asked to do so.
3. The details of the complaint should be explained to the alleged offender by the investigator.
4. The alleged offender should be given a reasonable chance to respond to the evidence of the complainant and to bring his or her own evidence.
5. If the facts are in dispute, further investigatory steps may include interviewing those named as witnesses.
6. If, for any reason, the investigator is in doubt about whether or how to continue, he or she will seek appropriate counsel.
7. When the investigation is complete, the investigator should report the findings to the General Secretary of the Union. The General Secretary should inform the Executive Committee.

c. Retaliation Is Prohibited

The IAU will not tolerate any form of retaliation against persons who file a complaint or assist in the investigation. Retaliation is a serious violation of this policy and, like harassment or discrimination itself, will be subject to disciplinary action.

d. Disciplinary Action

Individuals engaging in behaviour prohibited by this policy as well as those making allegations of harassment in bad faith will be subject to disciplinary action. Such actions range from a verbal warning to ejection from the meeting or activity in question without refund of registration fees and may, at the discretion of the IAU Executive Committee, include the reporting of their behaviour to the national committee and their employer.

The IAU Executive Committee may decide on further disciplinary action for repeat or serious offenders, such as being banned from participating in future IAU meetings or other activities for a period of time, or even having the IAU membership revoked in serious cases.

e. Appeal and Questions

In the event that the individual is dissatisfied with the results of the investigation, he or she may appeal to the IAU President. Any questions regarding this policy should be directed to the IAU General Secretary.